

# NO PRIDE IN GENOCIDE — SHAME!

## In the Name of Liberation QUEERNESS AGAINST EMPIRE

By  
THE NEW YORK WAR CRIMES

"Love wins." "Trans rights are human rights." "We say gay." So it may, so they are, so we do. And yet, Pride's truisms disintegrate when faced with the question of Palestine and the Zionist genocide being perpetrated in Gaza. How does one express themselves under rubble? How do we protect trans lives when hormones and other medical supplies are blockaded by occupation? When an Israeli soldier unfurls a pride flag among the ruins of homes he destroyed "in the name of love," do you care if he was born this way?

Palestine forces us to question the very notion of what pride has come to mean. It is not just that pride has been corporatized, militarized, white-washed, but that, at bottom, pride is only as good as what one is proud of. When your identity is being used as a shield for Zionist impunity, for the infliction of mass death, is the appropriate response, then, not pride but shame?

Palestine forces us to feel shame — and to transform that shame into action. The point is not to exchange the self-congratulatory platitudes of pride for self-flagellating feelings of shame, but to abandon a hollow and defanged "celebration" for a militancy of which it is right to be proud.

Palestine forces us to rethink how we fight for queer life and how we identify our enemies. One could start with the nefariousness of Israel's pinkwashing — its self-promotion as a queer paradise to distract from its violence in Palestine. In this issue of *The New York War Crimes*, we unmask pinkwashing's blatant

cynicism. Here, we lay out some of its strategies, explore how its interactions with anti-trans journalism, and map out the network of foundations and institutions that allow pinkwashing to operate.

But combatting pinkwashing, important as it may be, is not enough. Pinkwashing is not only a strategy deployed by Zionists in bad faith — it is a trap. Wrestling with it means battling down Zionists, rather than engaging the actualities of queer life and liberation in Palestine.

## Palestine forces us to question what pride has come to mean

In these pages, you'll find a variety of attempts to approach queerness and Palestine at once — drawing on history, personal experience, political analysis, and poetic expression.

We dive into the colonial history of sodomy laws in Palestine and how their legacy has shaped queer life. Looking to the present, you'll find interviews with queer Gazans speaking frankly about their challenges, desires, and how their multiple identities shape their experiences. Finally, because lived experience must be translated into political mobilization, you'll find statements and speeches from queer Palestinian activists calling on us to stand in solidarity with queer Palestinians — from the river to the sea.

## "All Struggles Must Go Hand in Hand"

By  
HUDA JADALLAH

*Palestinian-American lesbian Huda Jadallah first delivered this speech at the Lesbian Forum on Palestine, June 1989 in the Bay Area. The forum was sponsored by Lesbians in Solidarity with the Palestinian People and the Arabic Lesbian Network. It was originally printed in the newsletter of the Gay and Lesbian Arabic Society and republished in Boston's "Gay Community News" vol. 17, no. 30. It came to our attention via the Instagram account @lesbian.ephemera.*

Tonight I will be speaking mainly from personal experience since literature on Palestinian lesbianism is not accessible. I have had a very fruitless search for a long time now. I would have loved to be able to give you statistics and hard facts on Palestinian lesbianism, but unfortunately, at this point, due to homophobia, research on Palestinian gays and lesbians is not available.

I went to Palestine last summer and did a little digging of my own. In conversations with other women I got nowhere and found out nothing about Palestinian lesbians. To me this is a sign of the underground nature of lesbianism in Palestinian society. I also feel that if I had stayed longer and had developed closer ties that I may have been let into the underground community.

I spoke with a man and a woman from El Hakawati, which is a People's Theatre Troupe. They have been closed down several times by Israeli authorities due to the political nature of their plays. So I asked if they have ever done a play bringing up the is-

sue of lesbian and gay rights. There was complete silence for at least 30 seconds when finally the man looked at the woman and said "Do we have gays and lesbians?" She in turn looked at me and said, "That is too taboo, too taboo."

I also spoke with Joshua Schoffman of the Israel Civil Liberties Association. This Association is similar to the ACLU. They do legal work representing oppressed people, including gays and lesbians. Although they had done cases

representing gays and lesbians, and had done cases representing Palestinians, they had done no cases representing Palestinian gays and lesbians. These are just a few examples of my fruitless search, which is an indication of the degree to which Palestinian gays and lesbians are underground.

For me, the homophobia of the Palestinian community and the anti-Arab racism of the lesbian community became very apparent as I was struggling with coming out publicly. As I was struggling to come out, I realized that I belonged to two communities which are very isolated from each other.

The lesbians were encouraging me to come out, but I often felt no understanding from them of the pain involved with the anticipated rejection from Palestinians. Also, Palestinian lesbians are invisible lesbians of color. Where other lesbians of color have built communities, we remain in

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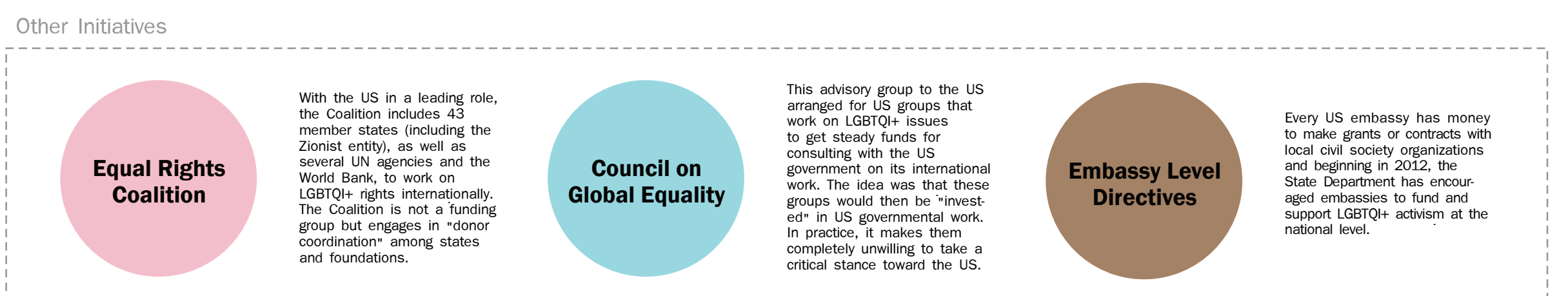
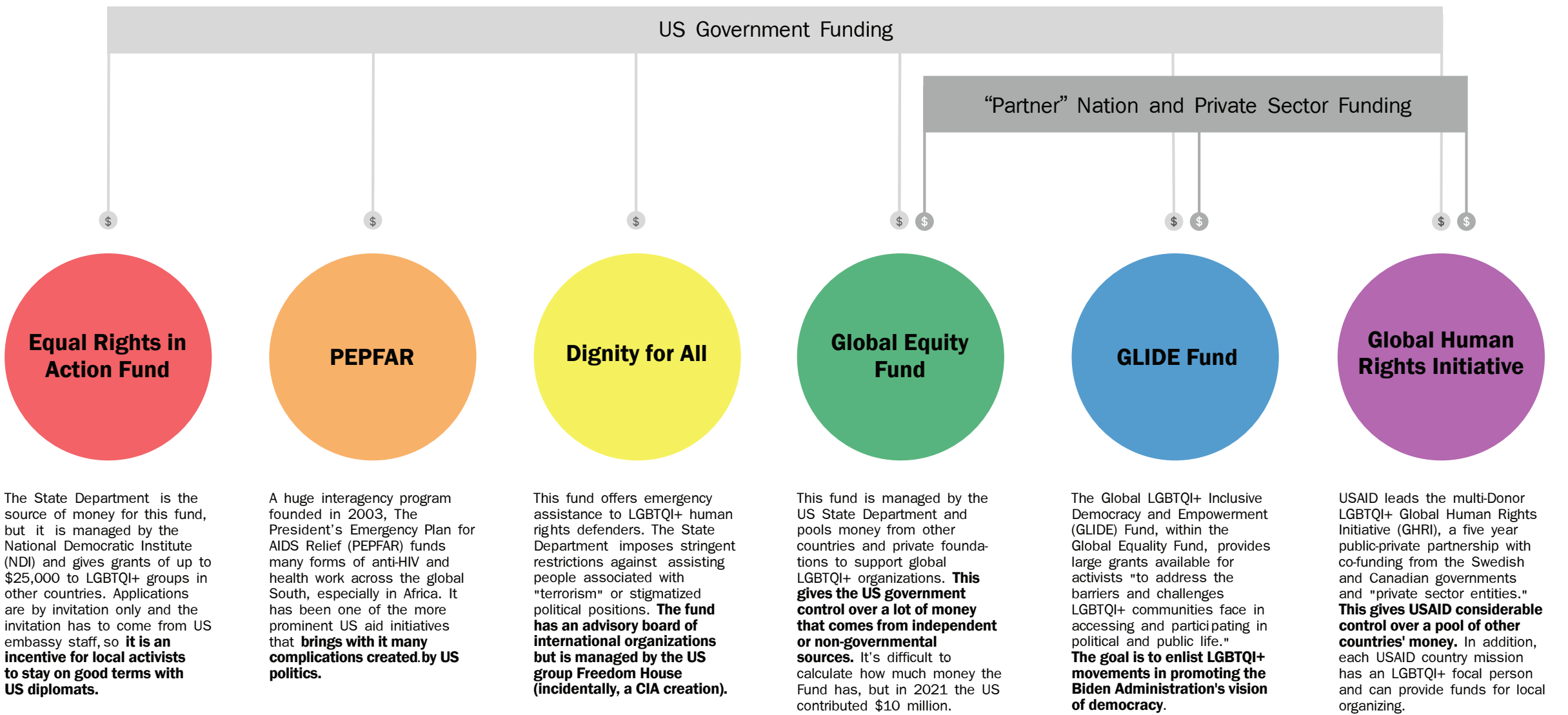


Queer Arab life in the 1920s captured by the photographer Maria al Khazen.

# WOULD YOU LIKE SOME GENOCIDE WITH YOUR AID?

Since 2012, the US government has pumped large sums into LGBTQI+ movements worldwide. Great, right? Not so fast — there are some problems... *First*, there are so many funding streams that no one knows exactly how much money is involved. Outside oversight and evaluation of the funding is impossible. *Second*, the US pools its money with other government and private funders, often non-transparently. Other funding is subject to US control and grantees often don't know if aid comes from the US government. *Third*, and most seriously, the aid discourages LGBTQI+ movements — whether subtly or overtly — from public, critical analysis of US foreign policy. Here we present an overview, based on research by Scott Long, of the US-backed funding network of queer organizations worldwide.

## US Government Money Supports and Distorts LGBTQI+ Organizing Worldwide



## Lesbians and Palestine

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isolation from each other. We also are isolated from other lesbians of color, who know little, if anything, about Palestinians — about who we are, about our struggle, and who sometimes feed into negative stereotypes. The hardest thing for me has been the realization that lesbian sisters knew so little about Palestine.

Whereas the lesbians were encouraging me to come out, the Palestinians were encouraging me to stay in the closet. They said that I would not be politically effective if I were out and that if I chose to be out that I should not work in the Palestinian community because I would be rejected. The warnings I received have not been totally true.

“The hardest thing for me has been the realization that lesbian sisters knew so little about Palestine.”

The larger consequence of Palestinian homophobia is that gay and lesbian rights have not been included on the Palestinian political agenda. Where the Palestinian political agenda has been progressive in so many ways, especially on women's equality, gays and lesbians are politically invisible in Palestine. The national struggle is seen as more important. But I strongly believe that all struggles must go hand-in-hand and must be worked on simultaneously. The Palestinians are working to create a new society, a Palestine free of all forms of oppression, including race, sex, class, and religious oppression. It is essential that sexuality be included on their agenda.

It is difficult for me to speak out about racism and homophobia. Because both communities are already stereotyped and negatively portrayed, it became natural for me to want to speak out about only the positive things, to hide the dirt. But I feel that I must speak out. It is important that the truth be spoken so that changes can be made. And just as it is important for me to speak out, so it is important for you to speak out, to educate yourselves on Palestinians' issues and speak out. Speak out for Palestinian rights. Take a stand against your U.S. tax dollars being spent on Israel's military. As lesbians who experience oppression every day, we must work towards ending the oppression of all people.



At a protest in Haifa organized by the queer Palestinian collective Al Qaws, July 26, 2016

## Beyond Pinkwashing

For Queer Liberation and Palestinian Resistance

Israel feigns concern for the safety of queer Palestinians by alleging that its war on Gaza is in fact a war against Hamas — and, by extension, a war against homophobia, even a war for queer liberation. But when Zionism is confronted with the actual victims of its campaign of murder and manufactured famine, the queer Palestinian ceases to exist.

In the Zionist imaginary the missile is not a homophobic weapon, no matter how great the destruction it wreaks and no matter how many queers it kills. In fact it is the opposite: by destroying Gazan society, it is destroying the source of homophobic oppression in Gaza. Following this twisted logic, the white phosphorus that rains over the fields, the bombs that have destroyed hospitals, schools, and places of worship, and each of the massacres committed over the last nine months have not touched the queers of Palestine; these war crimes, rather, will serve to free them.

The brazen suggestion that mass death could bring queer liberation is an instance of pinkwashing: a PR tactic that serves to mask the Zionist entity's war crimes by activating an orientalist fantasy about Israel as the only refuge for LGBTQ+ people in the region. Israel's pinkwashing implies that Arabs are so homophobic that they routinely kill any queers under their control, ne-

Freedom from homophobia requires freedom from the Zionist domination of Palestine.

cessitating Israeli colonial domination of Palestine as a matter of queer solidarity. Accepting this account means ignoring that queer Palestinians, like all Palestinians, have been subjected to settler-colonial violence, apartheid, and extermination by Israel for the last 76 years.

In this fantasy, the queer Palestinian exists only to justify the absurd logic of pinkwashing. As a subject they are simultaneously rendered visible as the cause of war, the passive victim in need of liberating, and invisible, unable to be killed by Zionist terrorism, only saved by it. The queer Palestinian therefore becomes a projection of the colonizer's fantasy — a blank canvas stripped of life and agency, and whose anti-Zionist politics and resistance are erased and subsumed into support for the Zionist entity.

Although the queer Palestinian might only occur to the Zionist imagination when rhetorically convenient, the queer Palestinian exists in reality at all times. Queer Palestinians suffer, like every Palestinian suffers, under siege. Equally subject to genocide, equally martyred by airstrikes. There is no separating the oppression of queer Palestinians from the violence they suffer at the hands of “liberated” occupiers. Freedom from homophobia requires freedom from the Zionist domination of Palestine. Queer Palestinian liberation is only possible if there is a Palestinian future, a future to be Palestinian in. Israel poses the greatest existential threat to that future.

The typical response to pinkwashing is to affirm the existence of the queer Palestinian as a victim of Israel's violence. While that is certainly true, it repeats the Zionist erasure, depriving queer Palestinians of political agency, flattening them into a one-dimensional rhetorical prop. To actually recognize the queer Palestinian we must stand in solidarity with their resistance. What if queers the world over didn't just see themselves in the queer Palestinian victim but in the resistance fighting against their annihilation? To stand in solidarity with queer liberation the world over means committing to that resistance: the Zionist entity must be destroyed.

### Queer Poetry for a Free Palestine

## Ghazals for Sharon Cohen (Dana International)

By TRISH SALAH

Between 1998 and 2024

The first three ghazals from *Wanting in Arabic* (2002) were occasioned by the news of Dana International's 1998 Eurovision win. As a figure representing a multicultural and queer/trans friendly Israel, Dana International's success in many ways paved the way for Israel's subsequent pinkwashing campaigns. She garnered both positive attention and notoriety as a trans woman presenting an unapologetically sexual and queer femininity, as a Yemeni Jewish singer making linguistically and culturally hybrid music, and for her denunciation of governmental homophobia and the Israeli right wing. These ghazals demand that Dana's refusal of respectability politics and anti-Arab racism, as well as her invocation of shared Arab Jewish cultural and musical heritage, encompass solidarity with Palestinian liberation.

The final ghazal, written in 2024, draws on Dana's lyrics and speeches over the years and responds to her role as Israel's ambassador to the international LGBT community during its campaign to pinkwash genocide in Gaza. This is not a new position for her. In 2010, Dana publicly defended Israeli commandos' killing of nine Turkish activists in their assault on the aid ship, Mavi Marmara. According to her personal assistant, Shai Kerem, “Dana, who always goes with her truth, will stand for an interview tomorrow with a special T-shirt printed with the IDF logo and she will be photographed with that. To say that as far as she is concerned the Israeli army is beyond all political debate. The soldiers and the army are doing the work for all of us and they are beyond all controversies.”

I  
In the defiles—a Jew, or, assembling the signs  
Of a detour. Landing, her parents in the camps.

Neither sexed nor given to Arabic in the home.  
Can you believe it? In Israel? Of Israel?

In Palestine, we know, four hundred villages  
Ceased. For that, “In the beginning. . .”

Do you dream of Yemen, Dana?  
(As I dream of Lebanon?)

In Europe they praise you, Diva—  
Jews have not always fared so well.

II  
Sharon is singing, between two languages, three.  
In your second sex, improvised mother tongue.

They say you corrupt the youth of Cairo.  
That you collaborate with Mossad.

At home, Likud and Shas denounce you.  
“Home” is burnt sand, disappearance in light.

Later, your songs are banned in Germany.  
They say, Arabs and Turks are the new Jews.

In a feminine voice, what hazard's presence.  
In your house, is there shelter, in Palestine?

III  
“The Girl for 2000,” beautiful, transsexual—  
Web banners we all aspire to

Embody. Emboldened, the possible this night  
Glamour, for ever freedom's caprice.

As in air or errant, as in love, I imagine  
Cascading translations' incandescence.

What a body wouldn't do, shall, in time,  
Transpire, breaking lines, a people's musculature.

What comes before? Cherish your singing voice, Sharon  
This moment of dwelling toward the sky.

Spring 2024

Saida Sultana, who dreamt such a stage for your story this night?  
No one can say what you are, who you don't need to be tonight.

By whose history do you style yourself Cleopatra or Afroditia tonight?  
مجنونة, Victoria, or Israel's Queen? Do you still travel to Petra at night?

One time you said, “No politics just peace and love and light.”  
Another, walking the interviewer's tightrope, “I'm ready to fight.”

After Mavi Marmara, were you already gone, washed in pink light?  
Were you feeling so sexy, so fierce in your IDF t-shirt that night?

Now between soundbites, if you shed your prayers, shed no tears tonight,  
Under rubble and bomb, are your fellow Arabs human, even real to you tonight?

Would you ride a pride float of the dead from the river to the sea tonight?  
Don't you know? No one is free, without a free Palestine, on this or any night.



“Sinai,” (2018), Nabil Harb

## Continuance

By NOOR HINDI

Every month, a new month. I wake up and start running. I wake up and my face is small and numb. If you make it to mile 10 you can make it to anything. My arms refuse everything. My brother died in January. The kitchen sink was emptied of clutter. The bedroom light needed replacing. I am afraid of stairways, the fragility of children, my mother's hands, their gentle reach toward me. For hours, I lose empathy for anything that moves. Lessons learned: You can build a garden and weeds will bloom. You can speak of joy and your heart will bleed. The sun will rotate and you'll hate it. Dear Allah: I am writing to you in green and there are children under the rubble. The boy gasps: I am alive. I am alive. I am alive and useless as ivy. The students are tear gassed. A pig looks at me and smiles. I daydream of smashing his head into the sidewalk. I daydream of bombs in the sky murdering the president of the United States. I sleep with the lights on, shake until my eyes force close. To be alive is to be a wound collecting sorrows. I tell my lover: I have tried every version of grief like a new pair of socks. Once, I was less resilient. Once, my brother was alive and wanted to live. Once, a dispatcher asked me: Is there a gun at the residence? The gun is in my mouth, I tell her. I've been holding it here for years. But I keep getting distracted. But I keep collecting days. To continue is a mercy. To continue is to think: If I end this life, would I miss this life? And then walk into the ocean, your grief a dog on a leash, your grief an olympic swimmer racing you to the soft center of everyone you love.

## With Friends Like These...

On liberalism, Zionism, and transphobia

Just as empires become most violent at the moment of their decline, anti-trans and anti-Palestine animus stems from a liberal order that already knows it's cooked. While the overlaps between the Zionist and anti-trans agendas are frequently stereotyped as far-right quirks, this is far from the truth. Just as anti-masking policies were pushed by petty bourgeois centrists, anti-transness and Zionism are mainstays of liberal American politics. We make this point by analyzing the overlaps in coverage of trans people and issues in liberal legacy publications like *The Atlantic* and *New York Times* alongside their coverage of pro-Palestine protesters.

We're used to the term “trans exclusionary radical feminist” to describe the anti-trans animus that comes not from the far-right, but from the “left” (though these “feminists” are often more than willing to work with right wing demagogues); in fact, though, this mischaracterizes the anti-transness most common to the *Times* and the *Atlantic*. The critic Andrea Long Chu argues that this anti-transness, which is neither far-right nor radical feminist, is better understood as that of the trans-antagonistic reactionary liberal, or “TARL.” In Chu's words, the TARL “sees himself as a concerned citizen, not an ideologue... he is not so much trans-exclusionary as he is broadly skeptical of all social-justice movements.”

To foreground the overlaps between anti-trans and anti-Palestine coverage, we would, unfortunately, like to introduce a new term: PARL, or Palestine-antagonistic reactionary liberal. The PARL, like the TARL, positions himself as an arbiter of objectivity. If young people are pro-Palestine, the TARL suggests, it is due to “social contagion” and the online “woke mind virus,” which has “infected our college campuses.” While free speech was a cover for anti-trans pundits like Matt Walsh to deliver guest lectures at college campuses, the PARL now uses free speech rhetoric to deplatform Palestinians.

The same liberal pundits pedaling anti-trans propaganda under the guise of “just asking questions” are manufacturing consent for Palestinian genocide: the TARL is often a PARL. *Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg claims, for example, that “Trans Kids Deserve Private Lives,



From the photo series “Eastern LGBT” by Palestinian photographer Ahlam Shibli, 2006.

Too”; but in the same article, she repeatedly conjures the specter of social contagion to speak about trans youth, espousing a respectability politic that deems some children worthy of gender affirming care and others wayward victims of peer pressure, needing to be forced back into cisness. While liberals like Goldberg love to contrast themselves with the openly homicidal anti-transness of the far right, their strategy of taking issue with the terms of trans political struggle end up having a similar effect. Similar to the framing of transition as a viral fad, solidarity with Palestinians and their struggle for liberation is seen as a youthful dalliance, in which college-age naïveté allows teens to be brainwashed by “radical Islamists.”

When writing about the Palestine solidarity movement, the PARL similarly situates herself as the reasonable middle ground between two extremes, a rhetorical sleight of hand that demonizes pro-Palestinian organizers and tacitly endorses right-wing crackdowns. For example, on October 12th, 2023, Goldberg published

“The Massacre in Israel and the Need for a Decent Left,” which laments the “betrayal” and “alienation” of seeing left-leaning Jews show solidarity with Palestine. Goldberg likens “edgelord anti-imperialists” to those who justify the Zionist entity's destruction of Gaza with barely suppressed bloodlust and she blames pro-Palestinian protesters for “the fracture [that] is coming” to the American left.

Despite these similarities, there are also some notable differences between the TARL and PARL; the difference is racism. The TARL views white trans children as damaged goods that can be salvaged by restricting access to gender-affirming care; Black and brown trans kids, on the other hand, are more likely to be criminalized. On a similar note, while the PARL sees white pro-Palestinian students as wayward but redeemable, Muslim and Arab activists are racialized as inherently criminal; state violence is therefore regrettable, but “deserved.” For the TARL and PARL, then, the racial distinction is one of protection and policing respectively. While a supposedly multiculturalist liberal-

ism should be against this illiberal repression, liberal pundits have overwhelmingly endorsed it.

Arguably, this increasing tolerance for violence doesn't mean that liberalism is growing more powerful, but that — like the two poles of the dying empires it is attempting to prop up — it is in decline as well; naked force is a last resort. But polls show that people of color, young people, and queer people overwhelmingly support a ceasefire. As with anti-transness, genocide is splitting the US liberal base, pushing some at the center to the left, but pushing many rightward. The task of the left, then, is not to pander to right-wing fantasies, but to capture as much of that split liberal base, to work toward building a popular front.

If the far-right wins in Europe's parliamentary elections show that a left-liberal coalition is more urgent than ever, such a coalition has never felt more distant. The anti-Zionist left opposes US Empire; liberals, like the far right, endorse it. If things aren't going well in America, there's always someone else to blame.

# “What haven’t I loved about Gaza?”

## Listening to the voices of queer Palestinians amidst genocide

In December 2023, two months into the exterminatory assault on Gaza by Israeli occupation forces, *Pinko Magazine* began collecting materials about and by queer Palestinians for a short zine with the aim of raising funds for relief and to provide a record of this supposedly contradictory group of people responding to the slaughter. They initially anticipated that this project would be small in scale and published quickly. They asked queer Palestinian comrades to serve as guest editors and put out an open call for submissions. Over the course of several months, however, it grew beyond their expectations. Writers, photographers, poets, journalists, and artists contacted them. One, the New York-based reporter Afeef Nessouli, has been in regular communication with many Gazans over the last nine months to coordinate supplies and evacuation and, in the process, they have shared their stories with him. Two queer Palestinians in particular seemed eager to talk. Nessouli contributed transcripts of his conversations over email with two queer Palestinians, ES and QFG, in Gaza, which were published with their consent. These testimonies of life during genocide also offer a sense of the place of queerness within Gaza.

We are reprinting excerpts from these unedited email exchanges with the correspondents’ names anonymized for safety. The complete interviews can be found on the *Pinko* website and their zine, *Queer Palestine*, is available now for order at <https://pinko.online>. All proceeds from sales will go to ES and his family and QFG as he establishes a life in Cairo post-evacuation.

### QFG, 23 years old, Rafah

INTERVIEW with QFG, while living in a tent in the southern Gaza city of Rafah during heavy bombardment. QFG has since evacuated to Cairo.

#### Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I am 23 Years old. I identify as bisexual. I live in Rafah and lately am usually sleeping in a tent or hospital. I Lost my adoptive family in an air strike but found out my biological family survived. I see them sometimes rarely but I’m always alone. Everyday in this genocide has been unending torture, a living Hell. I Usually spend my time praying, Looking for food, Walking kilometers Away, Looking for water and wood to Cook expired Cans of food, and animal food for my exhausted Kidney to accept. I just want to live my queer life freely.

#### Tell me about your queer life. Can you remember the first time you realized you liked boys too?

It was one time on the beach late at night. I had a car before this war

and a nice bike. Me and my best friend from childhood were cruising around with my car. Smoking hahaha. And bunch of snacks. Normal cigarettes btw (but i had quit long time ago). Anyways, we went to the beach late at night after being with one another all day. And we started talking really deep about how much we enjoy each other’s company. I was always scared to tell him i liked him and i feel emotions towards boys. He always flirted with me. I always seen it as jokes never realized he was the same. He likes boys and [is] into men.

I used to have a boyfriend and a girlfriend. We meet in different time and places and love has united the Three of us, my boyfriend was my best friend since childhood and my adoptive family (brother; they took me in after my family kicked me out), as for my girl I met her in college and fell in love with her. we 3 were so special and loved each other more than anything. they both died. we used to love to eat in Tabon restaurant one of the most Famous pizza places in Gaza where it’s just sand now, not even memories still there.

#### What is hard right now?

The hardest part of this Hell is Surviving whether It’s Surviving famine or bombing or mental trauma that makes me desire suicide to rest in peace where only god will show me love the world didn’t show me.

I have Unending stories I would love to share with you. I lived a life where you Don’t even dream to see in movies. I Wish to Tell you all about it when I’m out of here in peace one day for now I wanna share this:

My mental trauma is beyond any living Being in this world. I think about suicide every second the only thing keeping me Alive is the Hope of getting out of gaza.

#### What do you need people to know?

I’m asking for the community and the world to help to embrace me with love and help me make my Dreams true. to have a Chance of a new life, a new home, a meal and love and peace. I want to be evacuated and I want to be famous for my music and making films.



“Wadi Salib, a Palestinian displaced neighborhood in the occupied city of Haifa,” by Maria Zreiq (@maria\_zreiq) from her series *Exile*.

### ES, 27 years old, northern Gaza

#### Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

My name is E.S. I’m a 27 year old queer, HIV positive, disabled, artist, and online English language tutor. I live in the west of Gaza City (Northern Gaza). I live with my mother, 24 year old brother, and two feline companions. I’ve not been doing much in my days due to the ongoing eradicating genocide. My days have been pretty much repetitions of the past days. Every day is quite a struggle, juggling between attempts to provide what is essential to keep us alive and alleviate the psychological toll of this seemingly endless genocide. There is no easy part when it comes to what’s been happening but the hardest part, from a more general point of view, would be to negate and refute this realization that there isn’t any more humanity nor love left in this world to rescue Gaza from total eradication nor put this bloodshed to an end. On a personal level, the hardest part would be to try and remain alive and be able to foresee a future for myself, my family, and my people in this life where we can live in peace, freedom, and health.

#### You say you identify as queer. Do you have any stories about being queer while in Gaza?

I’ve never met anyone queer or gay in Gaza, but I’ll tell you a story about one time when my mother and I had to walk to the market. I don’t judge a book by its cover, and it’s inappropriate — I think — to assume someone’s sexuality based on how they talk, walk, or dress. Anyway, my mom and I were walking in what could resemble a market in a post-apocalyptic world and saw this guy with a fully

“... freedom from the shackles of homophobia and Israeli besiegement can be a state of mind even if not a tangible one.”

coordinated outfit and hand purse. I looked over to my mom and said, “I bet you that this guy is gay.” She just sighed in frustration. She doesn’t like it when I speak anything that deviates from what she considers “normal/natural/ordinary.” I know that even though I’m rebelliously open about who I am with her, she’ll always have that degraded vision of me in her subconscious and even conscious mind. It’s evident in how differently she treats me and my “straight and masculine” younger brother.

So, I identify as queer. I only learned what queer meant after having lived in the US when I attended college there. Before then, the only term that was there to describe myself was homosexual/gay, not that specific term but the Arab derogatory version of it (Luti). I became aware of my sexuality at a young age, as I engaged in exploratory behaviors with other boys my age starting at 5 years old. This whole notion of having a queer life in Gaza seems entirely out of reach due to the stigmatization caused by religious, patriarchal, homophobic, and heteronormative morals, ideals, and ideologies. Any act of resistance or rebellion embod-

ied in self-expression, advocacy, or even the embrace of queerness can cost your safety or even your life. The stigma surrounding queerness and the lack of education about LG-BTQ+ issues in a place like Gaza had serious consequences. That was my case. I was never embraced for who I was, and I never got educated about how to take precautions and protect myself. Because of that, I ended up contracting HIV when I had my first refuge to travel to Istanbul, Turkey, as a student at 18 years old.

I called it a refuge because I wanted it to be a place where I could freely be myself. There is so much to unfold of subsequent events there. Long story short, my HIV status would have meant deportation from Turkey, so I somehow managed to get a scholarship to go travel to the US, and there I managed to get my meds for approximately three years. But a spiral of unfortunate events caused by mental health challenges and due to the lack of proper support, I had to return back to Turkey, and after that, back to Gaza where I ended up disclosing my HIV status to my family. My family treated me with resentment, negligence, and disapproval, and for two years, they refused to let me get registered at the local infectious disease department of the Palestinian health ministry in Gaza to get my meds. It was mostly because of their fear of tarnishing their family name and reputation. Two years later, I started to have complications due to the virus spreading in my body and started to lose my ability to walk. That’s when they felt like their refusal to get me started on my antiviral meds could get me killed. Long story short, I got registered at the infectious disease department under a code/num-

ber instead of my real name, which didn’t cause their reputation to get tarnished, but I never managed to recover my ability to walk.

That’s how an occupation works; you have to sacrifice something essential, like dignity or rights, in order to stay alive.

#### What do you need people to know?

I want to know if I evacuate to Egypt if I can access my HIV meds without being a local. That is the main thing I need to find out. I want to believe that I deserve peace, love, compassion and dignity, even when the actions of the world at large don’t convey that. I yearn to reside in a place that affirms my pride in being Palestinian, queer, and HIV positive. I long to live without the constant fear of succumbing to the harrowing occupation, the complications of my illness, or persecution for embracing my queer identity. I crave acceptance and love for who I am, unconditionally. I dream of a place where I can access the necessities to sustain my livelihood and lead a stable, peaceful, and fulfilling life.

#### What have you loved about Gaza?

The question should be, what haven’t I loved about Gaza? Meaning, I’ve loved everything about Gaza. I can’t say that it was always that way unfortunately. When I was younger I didn’t like Gaza at all. My dislike of Gaza had nothing to do with the fact that it was occupied nor besieged but it was because I understood that my identity as someone who liked those beings of the same sex/gender as me could never actually be able to have freedom in expressing their true self.

That changed later on in life. I had the privilege to travel outside of Gaza and be in places where I could express who I am and live it out but my Palestinian identity never escaped me or so I thought. I needed to go back to Gaza as a grown up young adult to understand that liberation must be fearlessly obtained and processed internally so it can be expressed on the outside. I have loved Gaza because it taught me that freedom of the shackles of homophobia and Israeli besiegement can be a state of mind even if not a tangible one. If that makes any sense! But I must reaffirm that while this became possible through the hardest of paths for a whole two years before October 7th, unfortunately I can’t foresee a chance for any kind of freedom in Gaza post October 7th.

To give this question a more specific answer, I have fallen in love with all that entails what Gaza is, especially the small little details of it. But if I want to be 100% truthful, I’d say that I love the beach the most. I love watching the sunset or being driven along the beach road at night and watching the horizon.

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Follow up note from ES, approximately one and a half months after initial correspondence:

Hey Afeef! I’m still in the west of Gaza City, close to the sea port. There is a lot happening. The Northern Gaza Strip is being starved again. We are lacking any humanitarian aid coming in due the borders being closed for more than 45 days. Even if they were to be opened, there is little to nothing coming to the northern part. We haven’t had any fresh produce/poultry/meat/dairy products for

as long as I could remember. Whatever canned processed food that is left is being sold at much higher prices. It’s so much worse because most people are running out of cash and there is no banking services that are operational at the moment. It feels like a forever loophole where death becomes the ultimate salvation. Militarily speaking, northern Gaza is still being bombed. Recently the IOF has been using quadcopters to attack targets most of whom are civilians. We were once at the market where a group of people were fired at killing at least three people. It’s very terrifying to say the least.

I have two months of HIV anti-viral medication. And I’m definitely on the lookout for possible ways to access my meds. I want people to know that even though we have become accustomed to the fact that we have been undergoing a genocide for the past 9 months, it’s definitely not okay that this is still going on. I want the world to know that we deserve life just as much as everyone else. I want the world to remain vigilant in their advocacy for Palestinian liberation and most important to put an end to this horrendous genocide.

Speaking of medication. Whatever medication I was able to access since the beginning of the genocide is what ever was left in the infectious disease health department’s storage in northern Gaza. I was lucky to have that much lasting supply only because other patients who took the same medication have evacuated south. I believe that the number of HIV infected individuals in Gaza doesn’t exceed 30 individuals so I’m not sure of the urgency to provide medications for us. If they were to provide them, I wonder if they could deliver them to me up north.

## Prudish and Priggish

### The colonial origins of sodomy laws

Rebranding Israel as a queer haven has relied on the suppression of a surprising history that remains largely and conveniently forgotten: the actual legislation against gay sex in Israel and Palestine. For one, sodomy was legalized in the West Bank over three decades before its legalization in Israel in 1988. For another, Palestinians in the West Bank could legally engage in consenting same sex relations nearly twenty years before they could do so in Britain and a good half century before anti-sodomy laws were federally repealed in the USA in 2003.

More, while those who emphasize Israel’s putatively exceptional toleration of queer people often attribute its neighbors’ “backwardness” to Islam, the historical record suggests that the anti-sodomy legislation emanated from the prudish and priggish policies of British imperial administrators decades before the emergence of Hamas. Finally, the reason that anti-sodomy legislation persists in Gaza has everything to do with the accidents of history (Gaza was militarily occupied by Egypt whereas the West Bank was annexed by Jordan) and nothing to do with the intransigent moralizing of an allegedly backward Islamist regime. Indeed, the assumption of an inherent Arab homophobia is based in orientalist fantasy rather than historical facts. We hope that this timeline thus serves as a corrective to a record not often enough consulted.

#### COLONIAL LEGACIES

**1858** Ottoman legal reforms prohibit public copulation between men of the same sex. Historians have generally understood this provision as decriminalizing sodomy in private.

**1861** British Imperial administrators in India introduce a legal provision, “section 377,” prohibiting sexual activities “against the order of nature.” That law becomes a template for most anti-sodomy laws across the British Empire — including Palestine.



Cover of the 1858 Ottoman Penal Code, which legalized sodomy across the Ottoman Empire, which then included Palestine

#### FROM MANDATE TO NAKBA

**1923** British mandate in Palestine established.

**1925** Sir Gerald Leslie Makins Clauson, a civil servant at the Colonial Office, advocates for anti-sodomy laws in Palestine, amid fierce debates, claiming the practice (and bestiality) is so widespread that it has become a “national institution” and proposes the imposition of laws “gradually to wean the population to less unnatural practices.” The law is not imposed.

**September, 1936** Amidst the Arab Revolt that began in April, 1936, sodomy is prohibited in Palestine under section 152(1) (b)(c) of the code, which states that any person who “commits an act of sodomy with any person against his will by the use of force or threats” or “commits an act of sodomy with a child under the age of sixteen years” is liable for imprisonment up to 14 years, while Section 152(2) (b) states that anyone who has “carnal knowledge” of anyone acting “against the law of nature” is liable for a prison term up to 10 years.

#### FROM NAKBA TO OCCUPATION

**1948** The Nakba. Israel declares statehood and expels 750,000 Palestinians from their native lands.

**1951** British Mandate Criminal Code repealed in Jordan and the West Bank, annexed by Jordan in 1950. Replaced with the Jordanian Penal Code having “no prohibition on sexual acts between persons of the same sex.”

**1959-1967** Egyptian occupation of the Gaza Strip, where the Mandate Code stays in place and sodomy thus remains illegal in Gaza.

**1967** The Sexual Offences Act legalizes consensual homosexual acts in England and Wales.

**1982** Consensual same-sex sexual acts legalized across the entire UK.

**1986** The US Supreme Court rules that laws banning homosexual acts are constitutional: that there is no “fundamental right to engage in homosexual sodomy.”

**1988** Israeli ban on homosexual acts formally repealed by the Knesset.

#### THE RISE OF PINKWASHING

**2003** In *Lawrence v. Texas*, the US Supreme Court rules anti-sodomy laws unconstitutional.

**2005** “Brand Israel” campaign launched by Israeli Foreign Ministry focusing on Tel Aviv as gay capital of the Middle East, timed with Tel Aviv World Pride.

**2010** It is reported that Israel spends ninety million dollars promoting Tel Aviv Pride and other pinkwashing campaigns.

**2011** The term “pinkwashing” is popularized by Sarah Schulman’s *New York Times* op-ed.

**2013** Hamas attempts to amend the British Mandatory Criminal Code, proposing “flogging for adultery.” The amendment does not pass the Gaza legislature.



In the 2000s, invocation of gay rights became a central tool in Israel’s PR arsenal

# صورة تشري كويرية ومشترية للأجانب عشان مش موجودين بلا مهرجان



## A LIBERATORY DEMAND FROM QUEERS IN PALESTINE

////////////////////// WE WRITE THIS AS WORKERS, STUDENTS, FARMERS, PARENTS — AS PALESTINIANS, AS QUEER PALESTINIANS. WE WRITE THIS NOT BECAUSE OUR QUEERNESS EXCEPTIONALIZES OUR POSITIONS BUT BECAUSE IN THE SAME WAY WE HAVE BEEN OTHERED AS QUEERS, WE ARE NOW FACING PATRIARCHAL COLONIAL TACTICS THAT SEEK TO FURTHER ALIENATE US AS QUEER PALESTINIANS. To gather our words and energies requires an enormous effort. We are sickened that amidst these moments of spectacular brutality and carnage projected onto Palestinian bodies, including rape, torture, mutilation and maiming, we are diverted from grieving and organizing to make a demand.

////////////////////// Since October 7<sup>th</sup>, we have been witnessing an accelerated genocide unfolding in the Gaza Strip and in all parts of Palestine, blatantly and publicly declared on numerous occasions by Israeli governmental and military figures. The brutality and lethal magnitude of the atrocities committed by the Israeli state and its supporters produce increasingly harrowing conditions for those who remain alive in Palestine, every day, everywhere. This brutality has been sustained through the continued economic, military, diplomatic, and political support of world leaders historically and presently. We note, document, and narrate the hundreds of catastrophic massacres for the past 75 years at the hands of the annihilatory wrath of the Zionist regime; from Deir Yassin to the Tantura Massacre (1948) upon which Israel's foundation is based, to the Kafr Qassem Massacre (1956) to Sabra and Shatila (1982), and this is just to name a few. **THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF ANY LIBERATORY POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT TO ACHIEVE LIFE AND DIGNITY IF IT IS ALIGNED WITH THE GENOCIDAL DEATH MACHINE OF ISRAEL. ISRAEL IS FOUNDED ON BLOOD AND IS SUSTAINED THROUGH BLOOD.**

////////////////////// DURING THESE TIMES, AND IN LINE WITH ITS LONG-STANDING EXPLOITATION OF LIBERAL IDENTITY POLITICS, ISRAEL HAS BEEN WEAPONIZING QUEER BODIES TO COUNTER ANY SUPPORT FOR PALESTINE AND ANY CRITIQUE OF ITS SETTLER-COLONIAL PROJECT. ISRAELIS (POLITICIANS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND "CIVILIANS") HAVE BEEN MOBILIZING COLONIAL DICHOTOMIES SUCH AS "CIVILIZED" AND "BARBARIC," "HUMAN" AND "ANIMAL," AND OTHER DEHUMANIZING BINARIES AS A DISCOURSE THAT LEGITIMIZES THE ATTACKS ON PALESTINIANS. Within this settler-colonial rhetoric, Israel seeks to garner and mobilize support from Western governments and liberal societies by portraying itself as a nation that respects freedom, diversity, and human rights, that is fighting a "monstrous" and oppressive society, illuminated clearly through the declaration of the Prime Minister of Israel "There is a struggle between the children of light & children of darkness, between humanity & law of the jungle."

////////////////////// While these blatantly racist genocidal declarations take the stage, activists in Palestine and internationally are being silenced, harassed, detained, criminalized, workers fired from their jobs, and students suspended from universities. International feminist and queer activists, in solidarity with Palestine, are

facing attacks and harassment by Zionists under the premise that those who support Palestine will be "raped" and "beheaded" by Palestinians for merely being women and queers. **YET MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, RAPE AND DEATH ARE WHAT ZIONISTS WISH UPON QUEERS AND WOMEN WHO STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE. ZIONIST FANTASIES OF BRUTALIZED BODIES DO NOT SURPRISE US, FOR WE HAVE EXPERIENCED THE REALITY OF THEIR MANIFESTATION ON OUR SKIN AND SPIRIT. YET THEY NEVER SEIZE TO ACCELERATE IN THEIR EXPLICIT VEHEMENCE. IT BECOMES EVERMORE ABSURD WHEN SUCH FRAMINGS ARE CONSTRUCTED AGAINST PALESTINIAN SOCIETY, IN LIGHT OF COUNTLESS TESTIMONIES, REPORTS, AND DOCUMENTATIONS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE PALESTINIANS HAVE BEEN FACING THROUGHOUT ISRAEL'S 75 YEARS OF MILITARY OCCUPATION.** From the thousands of Palestinian prisoners, men and women, who are subject to sexual torture and rape since Israel's inception to this very day, to daily and escalating settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, to Israeli "civilians" filming themselves torturing kidnapped Palestinians as a TikTok trend, and the most recent harrowing footage published on social media platforms by Israeli soldiers which document the lengths of torture and sexual abuse soldiers and settlers inflict on our bodies regardless of their sexual orientation and gender — **ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE, INCLUDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE ARE SYSTEMATICALLY AND STRUCTURALLY PART OF ZIONIST DOMINATION OVER PALESTINIAN LIFE. AND YET ISRAELI SOCIETY CONTINUES TO WEAPONIZE QUEERNESS FOR THE PURPOSES OF JUSTIFYING WAR AND COLONIAL REPRESSION, AS IF THEIR BOMBS, APARTHEID WALLS, GUNS, KNIVES, AND BULLDOZERS ARE SELECTIVE OF WHO THEY HARM BASED ON SEXUALITY AND GENDER.**

////////////////////// WE REFUSE THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF OUR QUEERNESS, OUR BODIES, AND THE VIOLENCE WE FACE AS QUEER PEOPLE TO DEMONIZE AND DEHUMANIZE OUR COMMUNITIES, ESPECIALLY IN SERVICE OF IMPERIAL AND GENOCIDAL ACTS. WE REFUSE THAT PALESTINIAN SEXUALITY AND PALESTINIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIVERSE SEXUALITIES BECOME PARAMETERS FOR ASSIGNING HUMANITY TO ANY COLONIZED SOCIETY. WE DESERVE LIFE BECAUSE WE ARE HUMAN, WITH THE MULTITUDE OF OUR IMPERFECTIONS, AND NOT BECAUSE OF OUR PROXIMITY TO COLONIAL MODES OF LIBERAL HUMANITY. WE REFUSE COLONIAL AND IMPERIALIST TACTICS THAT SEEK TO ALIENATE US FROM OUR SOCIETY AND ALIENATE OUR SOCIETY FROM US, ON THE BASIS OF OUR QUEERNESS. We are fighting interconnected systems of oppression, including patriarchy and capitalism, and our dreams of autonomy, community, and liberation are inherently tied to our desire for self-determination. **NO QUEER LIBERATION CAN BE ACHIEVED WITH SETTLER-COLONIZATION, AND NO QUEER SOLIDARITY CAN BE FOSTERED IF IT STANDS BLIND TO THE RACIALIZED, CAPITALIST, FASCIST, AND IMPERIAL STRUCTURES THAT DOMINATE US.**

////////////////////// We call on queer and feminist activists and groups around the world to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people in their resistance to

displacement, land theft, and ethnic cleansing and their struggle for the liberation of their lands and futures from Zionist settler-colonialism. This call cannot be answered only by sharing statements and signing letters but by an active engagement with decolonial and liberatory struggles in Palestine and around the globe. Our unequivocal demands are as follows:

////////////////////// **REJECT ISRAELI FUNDING, REFUSE COLLABORATIONS WITH ALL ISRAELI INSTITUTIONS, AND JOIN THE BDS MOVEMENT.**

////////////////////// **STRIKE: SILENTLY OR PUBLICLY, REFUSE THAT YOUR EXPLOITED LABOR BE USED FOR THE SILENCING OF PALESTINE ACTIVISM OR THE FUNDING, SUPPORT, AND ENDORSEMENT OF MILITARY SETTLER COLONIZATION AND GENOCIDE.**

////////////////////// **DO WHAT ANTI-COLONIAL QUEERS HAVE DONE FOR DECADES, RECLAIM THE NARRATIVE, AND SET THE TERMS OF THE CONVERSATION, THIS TIME ABOUT PALESTINE. WHAT IS HAPPENING IN PALESTINE IS GENOCIDE. ISRAEL IS A SETTLER-COLONY. PALESTINIANS ARE A MILITARILY OCCUPIED AND COLONIZED SOCIETY. UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW, ISRAEL DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO "DEFEND" ITSELF AGAINST THE POPULATION IT OCCUPIES, WHILE PALESTINIANS HAVE THE RIGHT TO RESIST THEIR OCCUPATION. DEMANDING CEASEFIRE IS THE FIRST STEP IN HOLDING ISRAEL ACCOUNTABLE FOR ITS CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY. WE MUST ALSO DEMAND TO BREAK THE SIEGE ON GAZA AND THE DISMANTLEMENT OF THE ZIONIST SETTLER-COLONY.**

////////////////////// **CONTACT YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES TO PRESSURE THEM INTO DEFUNDING THE GENOCIDE, ENDING THEIR MILITARY, DIPLOMATIC, AND POLITICAL SUPPORT WITH ISRAEL. SPEAK UP AGAINST THE ONGOING AND COMPLICIT CRIMINALIZATION OF SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE AND THE COLONIAL AND ISLAMOPHOBIC PROJECTION OF EUROPEAN ANTISEMITISM ON PALESTINIAN AND RACIALIZED VOICES, AS WE ARE WITNESSING PARTICULARLY IN FRANCE, THE UK, THE US, AND GERMANY.**

////////////////////// **SHUT DOWN MAIN STREETS. ORGANIZE A SIT-IN IN YOUR LOCAL CENTRAL STATION. INTERRUPT THE FLOW OF COMMERCE. COMPLACENCY IS A CHOICE.**

////////////////////// **WE, QUEER PALESTINIANS, ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR SOCIETY, AND WE ARE INFORMING YOU: FROM THE HEAVILY MILITARIZED ALLEYS OF JERUSALEM TO HUWARA'S SCORCHED LANDS, TO JAFFA'S SURVEILLED STREETS AND CUTTING ACROSS GAZA'S BESIEGING WALLS,**

**FROM THE RIVER  
TO THE SEA,  
PALESTINE WILL BE FREE.**